



The Nigerian University System, Corruption and Erosion of the Public Good

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Abstract

This article examines the nature, causes and implications of the decline of the public good within Nigeria's university system over the past three decades. In that period, there has been a significant shortfall in the finances of the university system from federal and state governments, creating the material basis for its inability to recruit, retain and manage quality academic and non-academic staff. Essentially, it highlights how the self-interest of academics, expressed through their powerful union, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), has engaged in a struggle with government to improve the remuneration of academics rather than the quality of academic services. At the same time, corruption has sapped the system and led to significant levels of exploitation of students, in general, and the sexual harassment of female students. The public good within the university system is rooted in the constitutional provision that directs governments to provide quality and free education at all levels. But governments have failed in this mission, and families have had to pay for their children's quality education. This outcome has created massive inequality, with only the wealthy able to ensure quality education for their children, usually abroad. This has weakened the commitment of those in authority to push for the return of quality education at the national level. The result is that the Nigerian state appears to have provoked a class struggle in which poorly educated youth and the lumpen classes are marginalised and excluded from the ladder of social mobility.

Keywords: curriculum, higher education, university system, university governance, corruption, public good, academic freedom, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), sexual harassment, peer review, massification, funding

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Résumé

Cet article examine la nature, les causes et les implications du déclin du bien public au sein du système universitaire nigérian au cours des trois dernières décennies. Au cours de cette période, il y a eu un déficit important des finances du système universitaire de la part des gouvernements fédéral et des États, créant la base matérielle de son incapacité à recruter, retenir et gérer un personnel académique et non académique de qualité. Essentiellement, il met en évidence comment l'intérêt personnel des universitaires, exprimé par le biais de leur puissant syndicat, le Syndicat du Personnel Académique des Universités (ASUU), s'est engagé dans une lutte avec le gouvernement pour améliorer la rémunération des universitaires plutôt que la qualité des services académiques. Dans le même temps, la corruption a sapé le système et conduit à des niveaux importants d'exploitation des étudiants, en général, et de harcèlement sexuel des étudiantes, en particulier. Le bien public au sein du système universitaire est enraciné dans la disposition constitutionnelle qui ordonne aux gouvernements de fournir une éducation gratuite et de qualité à tous les niveaux. Mais les gouvernements ont échoué dans cette mission et les familles ont dû payer pour l'éducation de qualité de leurs enfants. Ce résultat a créé des inégalités massives, seuls les riches étant en mesure d'assurer une éducation de qualité à leurs enfants, généralement à l'étranger. Cela a affaibli l'engagement des autorités à faire pression pour le retour d'une éducation de qualité au niveau national. Le résultat est que l'État nigérian semble avoir provoqué une lutte des classes dans laquelle les jeunes peu éduqués et les classes impuissantes sont marginalisés et exclus de l'échelle de la mobilité sociale.

Mots-clés: curriculum, enseignement supérieur, système universitaire, gouvernance universitaire, corruption, bien public, liberté académique, Syndicat du Personnel Académique des Universités (ASUU), harcèlement sexuel, évaluation par les pairs, massification, financement

Introduction

In his lecture entitled 'Salvaging Nigerian Universities', one of Nigeria's most senior academics, Ladipo Adamolekun (2017), regretted the serious decline in the quality of universities and reminisced about his days as a student at the world-class University of Ibadan in the 1960s. He recalled the three qualities that made the university great: quality teachers, an enabling environment for learning, and international competitiveness. 'All three combined to ensure that Ibadan was indeed a world-class university', he concluded. However, he warned that we must not take the decline of universities in isolation. All other strategic elite institutions in the country, including the civil service, the judiciary and the military, have suffered a similar decline, he added. It

is indeed completely true that Nigeria is suffering from a generalised and dramatic decline in the quality of its institutions, and the current crisis that affects higher education cannot be understood in isolation.

I was a student at Ahmadu Bello University in the 1970s, and during that time the universities were still quality institutions, even if they had by then lost their 'world-class' status. The three qualities indicated by Adamolekun also applied to us. On graduation, I joined that university's faculty and, within a few years became an active member and later a leader of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), our trade union. The ASUU of our time, the 1980s and 1990s, was committed to sustaining the quality education we had. Alas, we won many battles but lost the war. By 2013, I could no longer recognise our universities and wrote the following in my newspaper column during yet another long and destructive strike by the union:

Over the past two decades, the compulsory sale of hand-outs to students by some lecturers and the sexual harassment of female students have become constant topics for musical lyrics and beer parlour jokes. More importantly, there is a significant part of university professors whose promotion has been on the basis of self-publication rather than peer review and many professors in Nigerian universities today have not got a single peer reviewed journal publication in their CV. This means that we have a growing percentage of fake professors in our universities who cannot stand up and get respect among their peers in the international context. ASUU demands to receive remuneration of international standards without a struggle to ensure that the quality of their members is also international can only lead to increased reputational erosion. (Ibrahim 2013: 12)

This article is about trying to understand how we got to this terrible situation within the context of the decline of the public good in higher education. The easy part of the story is the story of declining finances in the university system, which made it difficult for the universities to recruit and above all to retain quality staff, engage in research and provide a conducive atmosphere for learning and research. The more complex story relates to the corruption of Nigerian society in general, which created a mentality of looting and wanton exploitation in whatever situation people found themselves. ASUU was also unable to retain its focus on the struggle for academic freedom and university autonomy and transformed into a more classical union seeking to protect the interests of its members alone. To some extent it lost sight of the essentials – students, teaching and research.

Methodology

The study is based on literature review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. It is therefore essentially qualitative in approach. Key informant interviews were conducted across the country's university system based on purposive sampling of the political leadership of the Ministry of Education, the National Universities Commission, Academic Staff Union of Universities officials, vice-chancellors, chairpersons of university councils, the TET fund and the business community. Focus group discussions were conducted with students of three universities. The author also draws from his personal knowledge, having served as a member of the tactical committee of the Academic Staff Union of Universities for almost a decade.

The discussion aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the university system and the pursuit of the public good within the context of a serious crisis in the educational system. We seek to show that the essence of this conjuncture is rooted in the changing dynamics of conceptions and understandings of the public good since the 1980s. The notion of higher education and the public good is informed by a range of political, economic and social factors that characterised that particular historical epoch. The economic crisis of the 1980s and the policy response adopted in the form of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) precipitated the predicament in higher education. Central to this quandary, therefore, is the failure of the developmental project of the Nigerian state. Partly because of this, the system of higher education was improved on the initiative of the founding fathers of the nation, who considered education as an important value the country owed to its children. Enrolment grew at all levels of education, and the university, which had been conceived as the privilege of a small elite, was confronted with the problem of massification as student numbers exploded.

Massification created a crisis in the state's capacity to cope with the need for increased funding. What was even more profound, however, was the entry of globally influenced, market-driven policies towards higher education that restricted the perceptions of the benefits of higher education to its economic value and framed the quality and effectiveness of institutions within these parameters. Specifically, the forces of globalisation represented by the Bretton Woods institutions pushed for a radical approach that devalued higher education in countries where the economic performance levels, they believed, did not justify high levels of investment. In other words, higher education was no longer a national priority. In terms of the political economy, the most important transformation that occurred was rising inequality, which led to the exit of elite children from public education, thereby creating a sharp class divide between the quality of education in the public and private sectors.

It is also important to understand the impact of people's positioning in relation to the higher education system and how this may influence how they make sense of higher education, the public good and private interests. University academics, trade unions and students have organised effectively to challenge the state's attempt to withdraw from its commitment to fund public education. The upper echelons of the elite have responded by taking their children out of the arena of public education. Consequently, they have diverted funds from the sector. The move of the elite away from public education in a context of growing inequality signalled a value shift from the pursuit of the public good to private gain, based on access to high-quality or low-quality education. From an understanding of education as an instrument that benefits extended families and communities, the elite has successfully restricted its impact to nuclear families and, specifically, their own children.

The Nigerian University System: From an Elite Arrangement to Massification

Nigeria has a long history of university education and a very large higher education sector. The higher education sphere in Nigeria presently encapsulates universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, which train teachers. It has been argued (Fafunwa 1975) that we can trace the history of higher education in Nigeria way back to 1827 when the Church Missionary Society founded the Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone. It had the mandate to train students from the British colonies of Nigeria, Ghana (Gold Coast), Liberia and Sierra Leone. It was the only educational institution that provided an opportunity to anglophone West Africans who may have qualified for admission into British universities but did not have the means to go there. In the early twentieth century, there was an increase in the need for skilled human resources, which led to the commencement of the process of establishing more higher educational institutions in the region. This gave birth to the establishment of the Yaba Higher College, in 1932, which offered courses in medicine, agriculture, engineering and teacher training (Yaquob 2001).

The Yaba Higher College remained the main higher educational institution in Nigeria for a long time and succeeded in producing much-needed indigenous personnel who serviced the operations of the British colonial government of Nigeria. Nigerian nationalists and elites saw the college as an inferior alternative to university education, and clamoured for the establishment of proper university education. Following this pressure, the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa, known as the Elliot Commission, was set up in 1943 to report on the organisation and facilities

of the existing centres of higher education in British West Africa and to make recommendations regarding future university development in that area. The recommendations of the Elliot Commission led to the establishment of Nigeria's first university college – the University College Ibadan – in 1948, which was an affiliate of the University of London.

In 1959, as the government of Nigeria was preparing for independence, it appointed the Ashby Commission, which made several recommendations, among which were student enrolment and admission criteria, flexibility of university courses, and the establishment of four universities. The outcomes of the commission regarding balance in the structure and geographical distribution of university education led to the establishment of the four 'Ashby universities' according to the then regional division of Nigeria: the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (Eastern Region, 1960); the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) (1962, Western Region); Ahmadu Bello University Zaria (Northern Region); and the University of Lagos (1962). In the same year, 1962, the University of Ibadan attained autonomous status as a degree-awarding institution. In 1970, after the creation of the Mid-Western Region, the University of Benin was established. The six universities established during this period, 1960 to 1970, are still referred to as the 'first generation universities' (Jega 1994; Yaqub 2001).

From 1975 to 1980, the period of 'oil boom' (which would later translate to 'oil doom'), Nigeria began to exploit its vast revenue flows from petroleum and associated products to expand its system of higher education. Specifically, the government established seven new universities. These were the universities of Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Bayero University in Kano, known as the 'second-generation universities'. Subsequently, the quest of the federal government to advance technological development in Nigeria led to the establishment of seven new universities of technology at Akure, Bauchi, Owerri, Minna, Yola, Makurdi and Abeokuta. These institutions were later merged with some conventional universities in 1984. Subsequently, in 1988, they were demerged, with two – Makurdi and Abeokuta – being converted into universities of agriculture in the early 1980s. A third university of agriculture was established at Umudike in 1993. Taking advantage of the 1979 Constitution, which placed education on the concurrent legislative list, states established their own universities (fourteen between 1980 and 1992), bringing the total number of universities in the country to forty (Jega 1994; Yaqub 2001).

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, there have been unprecedented developments in the university education system in the country. Access to university education was accelerated by establishing more state universities

as well as private universities. In 2010, the federal government approved the take-off of nine federal universities in states that previously had no federal university, bringing the number of universities in Nigeria in 2010 to 117, consisting of thirty-six federal universities, thirty-six state universities and forty-five private universities. In 2012, Nigeria had 122 universities (thirty-six federal, thirty-six state, and fifty private), seventy-one polytechnics, forty-seven monotecnics and seventy-nine colleges of education. Six years later, according to the Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (Abubakar Rasheed, KII 2018), the number had risen to 162 universities. Each of the thirty-six states of the federation has at least one university, totalling forty-seven. The latest is Zamfara State University. The following states have two universities each – Kano, Imo, Rivers and Edo – while Ogun State has three. Most of the seventy-four private universities in the country are faith-based institutions, but a few are owned by foundations and individuals.

The proof of access to university is in the numbers. University student enrolment rose from barely 100 in 1948 to 3,681 in 1962; 7,697 in 1965–66; about 17,750 in 1972–73; and about 250,000 in 1994 (Jega 1994: 3–5). Today the federal universities have a student intake of over 1.5 million but only 37,000 academic staff, which is 70 per cent of the existing requirement.

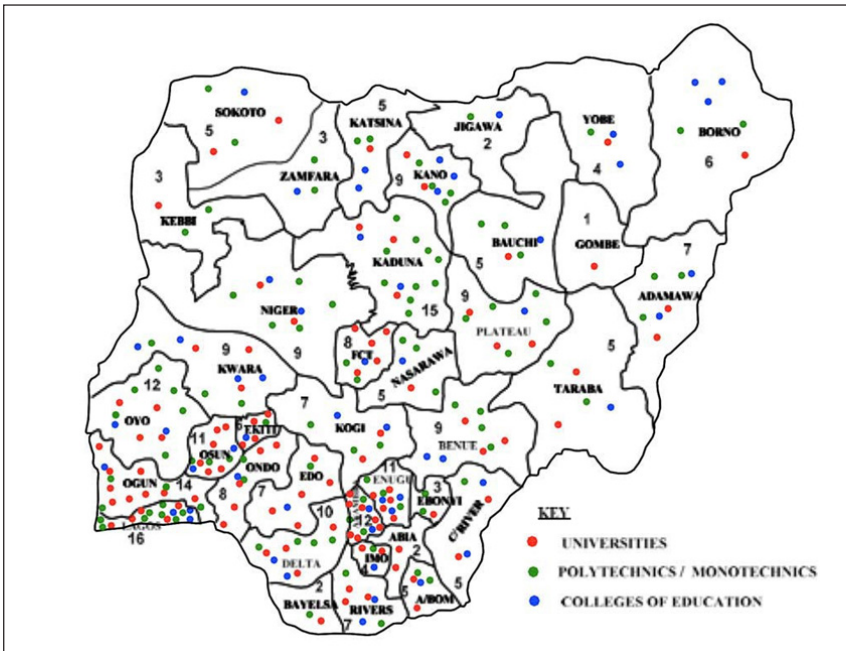


Figure 1: Geographical Distribution of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria
Source: Bamiro (2012)

There is an uneven geographical spread of these universities, as shown in Figure 1, with the southern part of the country having the highest concentration. This probably informed the federal government's establishment of nine universities in one fell swoop in 2011, with the aim of ensuring a federal university in each of the thirty-six states in the federation (Bamiro 2012).

Abubakar Rasheed (KII 2018), Executive Secretary of the Nigerian University Commission argues that the massification challenge faced by the university system is huge. Nigeria has a population of nearly 200 million, and over a five-year period, from 2012 to 2017, over 7.8 million young Nigerians applied to be admitted to Nigerian universities, but only a little over 1.5 million were actually admitted. This meant that only 19 per cent of applicants to universities over the five-year period gained admission, leaving nearly 81 per cent seeking other alternatives. Many of them had to go to colleges of education and polytechnics because they could not get into their choice of university. The danger for the country, he stated, is that it is grooming an angry and frustrated youth who believe that the state has failed them by denying them the means to achieve their ambition of getting a university degree.

State Policy: Education is a Public Good

Nigeria's national educational policy is based on the premise that the most effective investment a nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, social and human resources is in education. It is considered to be the greatest force that can bring about change. It is in this context that educational policy and framework becomes extremely important. The national policy on education seeks to engender the following:

1. The acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society.
2. The development of the intellectual capacities of the individual to understand and appreciate their environment.
3. The acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community.
4. The acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environment. (Yaqub 2001: 15)

It is in this context that the Nigerian Constitution defines education as a public good that the state has an obligation to provide to citizens in an equitable manner. Accordingly, Article 18 of the Constitution states that:

18. (1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.
18. (2) Government shall promote science and technology.

18. (3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end Government shall as and when practicable provide:
- (a) free, compulsory and universal primary education;
 - (b) free secondary education;
 - (c) free university education; and
 - (d) free adult literacy programme.

In pursuance of this policy, university stakeholders, such as student unions, the academic staff union of universities, trade unions, and left and progressive intellectuals, have held successive governments to this constitutional provision. It is almost a 'sin' for a Nigerian government to propose the introduction of tuition fees in the tertiary education sector. At the same time, government does not provide sufficient funds for universities to enable the quality academic and research output that is expected of them. The result has been a steady decline in the quality of the university system and the lowering of standards.

In the early days of the Nigerian university system, the faculty as well as senior administrative staff were essentially expatriate. Standards were set by the University of London through the tradition established by University College, Ibadan. Initially, staff organisation was mainly for recreational activities and social interaction. As the system developed, the process of unionisation started, on the basis of promoting the collective interest and the general welfare and conditions of service of the staff. This led to the formation of the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT) in 1965. NAUT had a membership strength of 1,209 at the time of its formation (Jega 1994). In its bid to improve the welfare of members of staff, in 1967 NAUT submitted a memorandum for a salary review, making the case that there had not been any salary review in Nigerian universities since 1959. There was no response to this memorandum and NAUT did not have the strength to forcefully push for its demands. In 1973, NAUT embarked on its first major industrial action, demanding an increase in salaries, but this was easily smashed by the Gowon military regime by mere threat, which in turn exposed the weakness of the organisation (Jega 1994).

On 11 February 1978, NAUT was transformed into a trade union and renamed the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) by military decree. It remained fallow for two years because academics were apparently unaware of the change. In any case, at that time academics did not consider themselves to be workers, so the idea of unionising professionals was strange in the Nigerian system, in which workers joined unions whereas professionals joined associations.

The turning point in terms of the debate over the public good and the Nigerian university system was in 1980. That was the year Biodun Jeyifo and Uzodinma Nwala were elected pioneer President and Secretary of ASUU. They both had a radical socialist ideological bent and were convinced that the state had a responsibility to provide the best education to all citizens without students having to pay. The public good was defined essentially as free and high-quality education paid for by the state. The Trade Union Act of 1978 allowed professional associations to operate as trade unions and it was in that context that the NAUT was replaced by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), a trade union.

For the new ASUU leadership, it was a golden opportunity for intellectuals to join the working-class struggle as trade unionists and provide intellectual support to the larger struggle to improve the educational system, but even more importantly, to contribute to building a progressive Nigeria. The subtext was that revolutionary cadres were in the process of linking brain-power to the task of the socialist transformation of Nigeria. Since 1980, a hard core of committed socialist intellectuals has succeeded in remaining the backbone that controls the affairs of ASUU. According to Nwala (Ndibe 2018), the Shehu Shagari regime had established a committee to review conditions in the universities under S.G. Kuki, and he and Jeyifo prepared a memorandum, which became the ASUU “bible”.

The arrival of radical unionism in the university system meant that engagement no longer focused only on catering for the advancement of the welfare of academics, but also on having a greater voice in the operations of the Nigerian university system and the affairs of the nation at large. It was at this point that the university community developed the mission that the ASUU was not just a union to fight for the welfare of its members but an instrument to serve the general good of the Nigerian people and play an important role in national development. In line with this new mission, in 1983 ASUU joined Nigeria’s trade union centre, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), as a full member. It was a choice that was calculated to broaden its base and increase its social relevance. In 1981, ASUU had strongly supported the NLC in its struggle for a national minimum wage. The formal integration of ASUU into the NLC brought the intellectual community closer to the working-class movement and made it more conscious about the plight of the Nigerian worker. Academics joined the fight for the right of the Nigerian worker in several dictatorial military governments and during the Shehu Shagari regime (Jega 1994). With academics now fully in the labour movement of Nigeria, from then on there would be a qualitative development and growth of the Nigerian Labour Congress. It would afford

the academics an opportunity to learn from the experience of the struggle of other workers (Jega 1994: 12).

In 1983, the ASUU grew and began to see itself as a sort of ‘People’s Tribune’ and defender of popular causes. The issues it engaged with after the overthrow of the Second Republic in 1984 became increasingly political. The new administration of General Muhammadu Buhari, which came into power in January 1984 during a period of serious economic crisis, rejected the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan on offer at the time and embarked on a pathway of nationalistic economic policies, which pleased the ASUU. However, the Buhari regime had little respect for human rights and completely disregarded academic freedom and university autonomy, to which ASUU was very committed. The ASUU soon got into trouble for criticising it. By the middle of 1985, the economy of Nigeria was in deep crisis due to a dramatic decline in revenues and the inability to pay for imports. The Buhari regime refused to accept the dictates of the IMF and World Bank and rising authoritarianism generated popular resentment. This created the conditions for its overthrow by Ibrahim Babangida on 27 August 1985. The struggle for university autonomy and academic freedom continued. ASUU used its popularity to join the fight for democracy after it became clear that the regime of General Babangida was not genuinely committed to its announced plan of returning the country to democratic rule and did not have a real intention to hand over to a democratically elected leadership (Jega 1994). It was only in 1999 that General Abdulsalami Abubakar handed over power to a democratically elected government.

Frequent and Long University Strikes and the Public Good

It is phenomenal that, in spite of all the changes that occurred over forty years, the ASUU has been able to maintain its radical engagement. Its preferred mode of action against government has been to strike, which has been an ongoing part of Nigeria’s national strife and trauma since 1982. The number of days during which Nigerian universities were closed due to ASUU strikes under the Fourth Republic are staggering: 1999 – 150 days; 2000 – 90 days; 2002 – 14 days; 2003 – 180 days; 2005 – 3 days; 2006 – 7 days; 2007 – 90 days; 2008 – 7 days; 2009 – 120 days; 2010 – 157 days; 2010 – 190 days; 2013 – 150 days; 2016 – 7 days; 2017 – 35 days; 2018–2019 – 97 days (*Business Day* 2019; *Premium Times* 2019).

For ASUU, strikes are the only action powerful enough to force government to provide additional resources for universities; they believe that they use this power in pursuit of the public good. However, the conduct of these long strikes may not be completely altruistic. Closing

down the universities and sending students home for three to six months forces parents to put pressure on government to accept ASUU demands. During the strike, the staff do not work and Nigerian law is clear in its 'no work, no pay' policy during a strike. However, after each and every strike, government has been forced to pay the salary arrears to the striking staff. Meanwhile, many academics engage in paid teaching in private and state government universities during the strike period. They therefore benefit materially from the strikes, which might explain why the strikes often run for a long time. Each strike ends with an agreement in which government commits to provide significant additional financial resources for the universities, but never pays up all that it promises. The result is anger in the universities, warning strikes and usually the organisation of a very long strike every two years or so. The focus of the strikes has become very narrowly focused on material benefits for lecturers. Students become the collateral damage of these strikes as their studies are disrupted and they stay longer at university before they graduate.

ASUU is right that the government promises and never delivers, and that it therefore should be held accountable. The Nigerian government is irresponsible and does sign deals that it has no intention of honouring. However, the struggle for a responsive and accountable government is a much larger one and goes far beyond the ASUU struggle. ASUU needs to learn what every trade unionist knows – the gains in the struggle are never total, they are always incremental.

It is difficult to justify frequent strikes in the university system as the pathway to the pursuit of the public good. It is clear that the strikes have become focused essentially on more money for lecturers rather than the lofty ideals that ASUU espouses. The strikes have seriously affected university calendars over the decades and generations of students have lost one to two years of their lives waiting for their lecturers to return. The strikes have shortened teaching weeks, affecting the capacity of lecturers to cover the course outline and thereby contributing to the decline in the quality of graduates. Precisely because of this impact, wider sections of the elite have moved their children from public universities to private universities where ASUU is not allowed to operate, there are no strikes, and lecturers teach and cover the course outline. As more of the elite take their children out of the public system, the unintended consequence is that, increasingly, the government commitment to rebuilding the universities is weakened; as the elite, have placed their children in private universities within or outside the country. Another outcome is that family budgets have transformed drastically over the past three decades, with a considerable percentage

devoted to expensive private education for children from nursery to tertiary levels. In other words, public education has been abandoned, left to the children of the poorest and least influential citizens.

While being critical of ASUU, I believe that, historically, it has been a positive force. According to Adamu Adamu, the Minister of Education:

ASUU is a very, very positive force ... Perhaps I should call them the conscience of education. Even if there is the will on the part of government to do good, sometimes it would require the academic staff union to push it, to insist. This is not a blanket endorsement of whatever ASUU is doing but in this respect, I think they are a force for good. (KII 2018)

ASUU has become almost the only institution that is formally engaged in the normative terrain of articulating and struggling for values and the public good. There is no doubt that without its strikes the university system would have been much worse than it presently is. It is for this reason that the ASUU struggle for the public good is legitimate, even if it does not achieve its full objectives. One of the limitations of the struggle is the assumption that the main problem is finance, which has to come from government. There is, however, a more profound problem, which is internal to the university system. Rising corruption is destroying the system from within.

ASUU and Rising Corruption in the Academy

The Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission identified academic corruption as one of the most serious challenges facing the university system, in the form of academic malpractice and sexual harassment. He hoped 'that between now and 2025 we should be able to have a fairly freer system, more honest, more transparent, more accountable, where the freedom of the staff and the students is better guaranteed and where all issues of corruption in whatever forms are being reduced to the barest minimum (KII 2018).

There are clear limits to the struggle of ASUU, among them being the responsibility of academics. Academic ethics has taken a hard blow as lecturers exploit their students by selling handouts and sexually harassing their female students. The academic principle of peer review has declined and a significant number of university professors are promoted on the basis of self-publication.

I followed with keen interest the debate spearheaded by Okey Iheduru on Toyin Falola's USA Africa Dialogue listserv (see Ibrahim 2013). Iheduru is an American professor of Nigerian descent. During his sabbatical in Nigeria, he had participated in six NUC accreditation panels and was shocked to find that universities routinely recruited mercenary professors purely for the

accreditation exercise. He started the debate by challenging this common and pervasive but fraudulent practice. Programmes that had been staffed for three to four years by an army of full-time and part-time assistant lecturers would suddenly list full-time and/or part-time associate professors/readers and full professors in order to meet the NUC staffing mix requirements. The worst culprits he said were the private religious universities.

He also challenged the propriety of the common practice of supposedly peer-reviewed academic journals in Nigeria demanding upfront monetary payment from prospective authors. He expressed his surprise at the virtual absence of policies or discussions about quality assurance regarding scholarship output in the university system. According to him, most of the Nigerian scholars he met had never heard of Google Scholar, not to speak of more reputable academic citation counts for published journal articles, including those published in Nigeria, or other (sometimes controversial) measures of quality, such as Web of Science/Web of Knowledge and Pearson's 'Impact Factor' reports on journals and academic publishers.

Most Nigerian scholars therefore do not live in the world of the international academy where peer review matters and is the basis of assessment. Nigerian universities still have some scholars who are respected internationally but they are now a minority. As Iheduru put it,

... it should worry us that an academic that boasts 50–100 'professional papers' cannot equally boast of one citation count on Google Scholar! ... More than 90 per cent of the CVs I reviewed listed as publication outlets 'Volume 1, Number 1' or Departmental journals or self-published books or books whose publishers' names and addresses are more innocuous and lesser known than the remotest streets in Ajegunle, Lagos or Ekeonunwa Street, Owerri. I concede that 'writing for themselves' is not unique to Nigeria, but most scholars elsewhere don't engage in this kind of massive inflation of output that is clearly indefensible.

Many Nigerian scholars are not even aware that academic assessment is not something to pay for. Given this culture of academic corruption, should the Nigerian government decide today to grant all the financial demands of the universities, there will be no fundamental improvement in their quality because of the internal rot that has destroyed them from within.

The failure of ASUU is its refusal to address these internal problems of academic corruption and collapsed standards. There has been a large expansion in the number of university staff and students without a commensurate expansion in quality. Massification in university intake has been accompanied by expanding mediocrity in the university system. In

addition to the problem of fake professors, most universities have a majority of junior faculty as staff and most of the few senior faculty members are of doubtful quality. University stakeholders must therefore develop a more comprehensive approach to resolving the problems in the Nigerian university system. A decline in government funding cannot be taken as the most serious problem confronting the academy. Merit and effective peer review must be returned to the university system. In addition, there are pressing issues relating to sexual politics.

The Rot Deepens: Sexual Harassment as Academic License

As far back as 1981, the Cookey Commission – a presidential commission charged with investigating wages and work conditions in Nigeria's public sector – unearthed evidence of significantly high levels of sexual harassment in the universities. They reported that passing or failing female students was often a function of their acceptance or resistance of sexual advances from some lecturers (Pereira 2007: 149). A survey by Project Alert of sexual harassment at thirteen universities revealed that 14.4 per cent of female respondents had experienced sexual harassment by fellow students, cult members in particular, or male lecturers (Pereira 2007).

Sexual harassment by academics is particularly insidious: the 'unethical and unprofessional conduct' of lecturers in using their institutional power to commit horrible crimes, mostly against women, is often overlooked because the institution tends to protect them (Pereira 2004: 2). Additionally, Pereira (2004) points out that the prevailing justification in the university system is that since civil servants corruptly enrich themselves in their offices so lecturers should also enjoy what they can based on what they have access to. It is in this context that lecturers started exploiting their students through the sale of marks or handouts and male lecturers started preying on their female students.

Academics are very defensive about sexual harassment of female students. The core argument they make is that many girls are corrupt and seek to seduce their lecturers to get higher marks, which they do not deserve. There is even a slogan that has emerged to justify the rising tide of corruption – 'Use what you have to get what you need'. Some male lecturers claim that many female students also believe in this, which is why they allegedly 'seduce' their lecturers. This is absolute nonsense as it wishes away the core ethical responsibility of teachers not to exploit their students. The reality is that many lecturers are misusing their position in the academy as a licence to harass, exploit and criminally assault their students. If this is not fought, the universities cannot be revived.

In 2019, many more reports emerged in the media about the criminal behaviour of some lecturers. For example, a 17-year-old student of the University of Ilorin reported that her Arts Education lecturer, in February 2019, 'locked his office while she was inside, pushed her to a table and raped her. The man covered her mouth to stifle screams and later left her alone in the office after the encounter' (*Premium Times* 2019). The accused denied the allegations, but multiple interviews with senior university officials, including the head of Department, the dean of Faculty of Education and the dean of Students' Affairs, confirmed that the attack had occurred.

Increasingly, the police are being invited to investigate such cases because many lecturers are never punished for their actions, since they deny the incident and their colleagues prefer to believe them rather than the girls who report harassment. Another case occurred in the Faculty of Education of Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, where a girl was raped by a lecturer, who was supposed to be her guardian. The police were called in and it was discovered that the lecturer involved 'was both HIV and hepatitis positive and had infected the girl' (*Daily Trust* 2019). In a second case in the same university, this time in the Faculty of Social Sciences, a lecturer threatened a female student: 'He plainly told the girl she can't pass the course without submitting herself to him. Left with no option, she came here to the Security Unit and reported. We set a trap for him by asking the girl to play along. He went and booked a hotel room, and we arrested him while he was attempting to have sex with the girl' (*Daily Trust* 2019).

These sting operations are being organised by Ahmadu Bello University because the university ran into problems when it sacked a professor for sexual harassment. The professor in question was said to have made sexual advances to his postgraduate student, who was married. The woman alerted her husband, and together they tricked the professor to meet her in a hotel room in Kano, where he was arrested. The university sacked him but he went to court to challenge the termination of his appointment. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, which believed the professor's story that he had gone to the hotel room to receive chapter three of the thesis she was writing. The court ordered the university to reinstate him. The standard of proof of sexual harassment has become very high as more cases emerge. According to the Chief Security Officer of Ahmadu Bello University, Colonel Tukur Jibril (rtd), 'We have to use evidence that even in a court of law, these people would not escape justice.' (*Daily Trust* 2019).

Has the #MeToo Movement Arrived at Nigerian Universities?

The most celebrated recent case of sexual harassment in the Nigerian university system is that of Professor Richard Akindele. He was demanding sex for marks from a female student; she recorded him and leaked the tape. The audio recording went viral and was reported on globally. The conversation was used as evidence by the university committee that investigated the matter, and both professor and student were invited to give testimony. The student said that the professor told her she had failed his course but that he would raise her mark to a pass if she had sex with him. The professor contended that the student knew she had passed but was seeking to score an 'A' and that this had led to him being the one who was sexually harassed. The committee's decision was that in both scenarios the professor's behaviour was scandalous in that it had brought ridicule to and tarnished the reputation of the university. This is interesting language, as it focused on the reputation of the institution rather than the harm to the student. However, the committee acknowledged the sexual harassment and dismissed the professor from the services of the university. A new twist emerged after his dismissal. He was arraigned in the Federal High Court, Osogbo, by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) for corruptly attempting to have sex with one of his students in exchange for marks in his course and was tried, found guilty and jailed for two years (Olawale 2018). The case set new jurisprudence in which 'marks for sex' became a criminal offence that could lead to prosecution and sanction.

The above case might not necessarily signal the growth of the #MeToo movement in the Nigerian university system, because specific circumstances made it possible. According to Pereira (KII 2018), the university has a Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies, which had been working on gender issues and sensitising students. Secondly, a non-governmental organisation – Women Against Rape, Sexual Harassment and Exploitation (WARSHE) – had been active in the university, mobilising students. Thirdly, a legal rights NGO – the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), led by Dr. Abiola Akiode-Afolabi – played a major leadership role in guiding the student through the difficult interrogation by the investigating committee, and they were the ones that referred the case to the ICPC. Pereira therefore argues that there must be enhanced efforts to provide enabling conditions for female students to successfully report sexual harassment and get remedy before the #MeToo movement has its moment in the Nigerian university system. Nonetheless, there has been a significant increase in reporting and investigation of sexual harassment since the Akindele case was successfully conducted and prosecuted.

The general corruption and spread of sexual harassment in the university system deepened over the years because university administrations and the ASUU have not invested sufficiently in developing and implementing a code of ethics to guide the conduct of staff and students. ASUU actually lost the moral high ground in 2016 when the Nigerian Senate proposed the Sexual Harassment Offences Bill. The ASUU president at the time, Professor Biodun Ogunyemi, argued at the public hearing of the Bill that the nation's universities and tertiary institutions as a whole were established by law as autonomous bodies and so had their own regulating procedures. ASUU, he said, would not accept the passage of any law to punish lecturers because it would 'violate university autonomy'. He added that the Bill was discriminatory because it was targeted at educators while sexual harassment was a societal problem and not peculiar to tertiary institutions (Vanguard 2016). While it is true that sexual harassment is indeed a general problem, various studies have shown that it is very prevalent in tertiary institutions and ASUU has not taken any initiative within the university system to contain it. Indeed, ASUU should be ashamed of this tacit defence of the culture of unbridled sexual harassment in the university system.

I agree with Pereira (KII 2018) that the university, like society at large, has not defined women as equal members of the public, so the public good has been conceptualised without seeing women as central constitutive elements. She argues that the public sphere itself has always been seen as an arena for private gain and that the travails of women in the university system are rooted in this doctrine, which sees women as part of the 'benefits' that male lecturers can enjoy. A more gender-inclusive approach to the public good is therefore required if standards and quality are to improve in the university system.

Funding

The issues that face Nigerian universities are associated with the links between the school system, disconnection from the needs of the economy and approaches to funding. In 1978, the then military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo abolished tuition fees at the universities and introduced what it called a 'tuition-free regime' in the tertiary education sector. This policy has endured for over forty years. The provision was inserted into Nigeria's Constitution of 1979 and, subsequently, the Constitution of 1999. Reviewing the provision is problematic because it is strongly supported by powerful forces such as trade unions and the progressive intelligentsia. Meanwhile, government faces other needs and has not been able to fund the university system sufficiently. Public universities themselves have very serious problems in that they cannot generate significant revenue streams to

compensate for falling budgetary allocations. As the tuition-free regime has become a no-go area, the question of funding remains fundamental.

Of all the input into the university system, funding is the single most-important non-material resource. It is generally said, 'Get funding right and most other things will fall in place'. But in Nigeria university education funding has declined consistently since the inception of the tuition-free system. Initially, the Ibadan College was adequately funded in all aspects of teaching and research because it was the only higher institution in the country. After the addition of the first-generation universities, education was still well funded and maintained at internationally respected standards. It was even reported that there were years when the funding received was slightly above the amount requested. According to Hinchiliffe (2002), the federal budget for education rose from NGN 6.2 million in 1970 to NGN 1,051.2 million in 1976. Thereafter, it declined to NGN 667.1 million in 1979, rose again to NGN 1,238.5 million in 1980, declined in succeeding years before rising to NGN 3,399.3 million in 1989. It dropped further to NGN 1,553.3 million in 1991 before rising gradually to NGN 9,434.7 million in 1994. In 1996, the federal government funded its polytechnics at the rate of USD 251 per student, its colleges of education at the rate of USD 394 per student and its universities at the rate of USD 300 per student. Thereafter, the declining trend continued. However, in the year 2000, funding for tertiary institutions did improve significantly (Afolayan 2015).

The cost of running universities can be broken into two major components. The recurrent costs comprise staff salaries and allowances, teaching costs, students' textbooks, stationery and boarding, as well as research and administrative support costs. The capital costs include items of long durability, like land, school buildings, teaching equipment, vehicles, staff houses and boarding facilities. The government is expected to provide adequate funds to match the various responsibilities of the public university educational system, both recurrent and capital (Okebukola 2002). The federal government is the major funder of higher education in Nigeria but the growth in this expenditure has been inconsistent over the years. The several contributing factors include economic recession, the country's huge foreign and domestic debt, declining government revenue mainly from petroleum, mismanagement of economic resources, and above all, mega corruption. But the key problem has been the phenomenal growth in the number of students and universities in the country.

Considering the above issues faced by the federal government, these institutions need to engage in revenue-generating projects with a view

to supplementing the government subventions. For universities, the obvious approach is to raise fees from students. However, this has been almost impossible at public universities, where ASUU, and indeed most Nigerians, are convinced that it is the government's responsibility to fund higher education. Part of the argument is that earlier generations received free education at the tertiary level so it is unethical to deny the current generation the same privilege.

The Nigerian university system is complex and class-based and operates in an international environment in which many within the elite send their children abroad for their education. The educational system in the country is completely bifurcated, with very low-quality public education for the poor and variable higher-quality education for the children of the elite. Alongside this divide, Nigeria has 13.2 million children of school going age who are not in school (Trust 2017). At the same time, the Nigerian elite send their children to some of the best-quality schools in the world but also to poor-quality schools abroad.

There has been an extraordinary development of private universities in the country. The expansion is not directed at addressing the crisis of massification, as private universities are expensive and therefore shut out the children of the poor. But although they target the children of the elite, for the most part these children are sent to foreign universities, as indicated above. The private universities therefore have too few students to be economically viable. In addition, they have very high infrastructure costs.

The Tertiary Education Trust Fund was established to provide supplementary funding for tertiary education in the public sector, but over the past decade it has become the only fund to provide direct intervention in key academic areas for the sector. This includes support for the provision of essential infrastructure for teaching and learning, the procurement of instructional material and equipment, support for research and publication and, most importantly, the training of academic staff to acquire higher degrees, attend academic conferences and publish their manuscripts, as well as the publishing of journals (Abdullahi Bichi Baffa KII 2018). Government has become completely dependent on the fund and has been reluctant to provide additional resources.

University Governance, Academic Freedom and the Curriculum

The university is known to be the highest citadel of learning for the production of intellectuals, researchers and general workforce for both governmental and non-governmental establishments. The International

Conference convened by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1950, in Nice, stipulated that universities worldwide should stand on three major principles: the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to follow wherever the search for the truth may lead; the tolerance of divergent options and freedom from political interference; the obligation as social institutions to promote, through teaching and research, the principle of freedom and justice, of human dignity and solidarity, and to lead mutually material and moral aid on an international level.

One way to achieve these principles is to resist any development that might erode their academic freedom and autonomy. According to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the right to education can only be beneficial if accompanied by the academic freedom of staff and students.

Universities are established by law and tradition to run on a committee system. Governing councils develop policies for the university, and the vice-chancellor and his or her deputies co-ordinate the policy implementation in conjunction with committees operating in faculties and institutes. Senate has responsibility for academic matters. As corruption has grown in universities, the first negative impact has been on the governance system in the university. In many universities, the committee system for university governance has collapsed and over the past few decades vice-chancellors have come to see themselves as sole administrators of their institutions. Private universities are relatively new and by the time they started coming up the committee system had already died.

Appointments to university councils of public universities are done as compensation for political support, and many join with the mindset of seeking contracts to enrich themselves rather than to develop the university. When a policymaker's interest is only to take from the system and not to give to it, you have a problem.

The general position in Nigeria is that in spite of the problems related to autocratic governance of the universities, academic freedom has been protected. According to the chief regulator of Nigerian universities:

In all public universities, especially the federally owned universities, there is academic freedom. As you are aware the freedom is largely being facilitated by the active interventions of the academic staff unions, especially the Association of Staff Unions, ASUU over the last three of four decades which have been harping on the issue of academic freedom in the universities with little interference from the government or the owners. In terms of research, yes, in fact, in my view if you ask me now as the chief regulator I will say

the freedom is even reckless because in terms of research, Nigeria has not defined its human resource and research needs. Virtually no researcher receives directives on what to work on. (Abubakar Rasheed, KII 2018)

The difficulty, however, is that Nigeria runs a centralised system of curriculum development. This is supervised by the National Universities Commission (NUC), which selects professors to develop curricula for all the disciplines. All universities in the country are obligated to use exactly the same course outlines, with no possibility of developing independent academic programmes. This is a serious challenge to academic freedom.

According to Abubakar (KII 2018), since he took over running the Commission, he has engaged in extensive reviews by getting stakeholders, including industry and professional associations, to participate in the review of curricula. He himself poses the following question on the irrationality of the present system:

Why should a student of agriculture in Port Harcourt read the same curriculum as a student of agriculture in Sokoto – one is in the desert and the other one in the swamp area ... So part of the reform we are doing is this realisation that the curriculum had been very rigid and we need to liberalise, and we have started. (Abubakar Rasheed, KII 2018)

The concepts of academic freedom and institutional autonomy are among the most important concerning the existence, mission and role of university throughout the world. According to Ajayi (1980), the two concepts relate to the protection of the university from day-to-day interference by government officials, specifically on the selection of students; the appointment and removal of academic staff; the determination of the content of university education and the control of degree standards; the determination of size and rate of the growth; the establishment of the balance between teaching, research and advanced study; the selection of research projects, and freedom of publication.

Historically, the institutional autonomy of Nigeria's universities has been eroded by prolonged military rule through, mainly, the appointment of vice-chancellors without regard to rules and procedures. The Gowon, Obasanjo and Babangida regimes summarily dismissed and incarcerated academics, and banned the ASUU. Vice-chancellors appointed by the military acted like 'military commanders' in favour of their appointees without minding the effect on the university institution (Jega 1994, 9–11). Jega identified three major responses by academics to academic freedom and university autonomy: complacency and apathy; complicity and duplicity; organised opposition and struggle championed by ASUU. The third response

attracted increased backlash. While they kept championing the cause of the institutions, some Nigerians criticised ASUU's demands. This quagmire painted a gloomy future for academic freedom.

The point is also made that prolonged military rule alone is not the cause of the poor state of academic freedom. Academics (ministers of education, special assistants, advisers, vice-chancellors, provosts, deans, directors, heads of department and heads of section) recruited by the military regimes, who initiate, implement and execute actions inimical to academic freedom because of selfishness, also share the blame. Jega proposes an academic culture and ethics and calls for '... a national consensus on a declaration containing the needs and aspirations of Nigerian academics'. This is to be done in line with the Lima and Kampala declarations, bearing in mind specific circumstances. He also proposes a code of conduct that can sanction its own. Underfunding, inadequacy of facilities, poor conditions of service and violations of university autonomy and academic freedom have contributed to demoralising academic staff. Suppressed, demoralised and pauperised, they in turn oppress and exploit students.

One successful aspect of the ASUU struggle was academic freedom. The universities now appoint the vice-chancellors without external interference from the presidency. All my conversations with my comrades in the universities, however, tell me that the expectation that the quality of academic leadership would improve with the application of this principle has proved completely false. Professors with dubious academic qualifications have been winning the struggle to be vice-chancellors. There is massive evidence of systematic plagiarism, and as more academic leadership falls into the category of those with doubtful credentials, the real battle to save the universities is lost from within.

Conclusion

Nigerian universities have lost the high quality they had up to the 1970s. The quality of faculty is low, the enabling environment for learning poor and they have lost, first their international and subsequently their regional (West African), competitiveness. This can be seen by the large number of Nigerian students who go to Ghana for higher education.

The decline was precipitated by the massive growth of student intake and rapid decline in public revenues, which led to a crisis of funding. The collapse would have been even more dramatic but for the strong commitment and struggle of ASUU in defending the universities as the site and essence of the public good. The ASUU struggle has kept on the front burner the 'socialist'

pro-poor provisions of Chapter 2 of the Nigerian Constitution. ASUU has, however, failed in entrenching the culture of public good within the university community, as corruption has set in and produced a culture of irresponsible behaviour and exploitation of the system. ASUU must therefore strive to broaden its struggle to confront the corruption that is destroying it from within. My key argument is that the depth of corruption is so profound that it has deviated the universities from the pursuit of the public good. University faculty motivations today are focused on the economic and sexual exploitation of their students while university management is engaged in massive theft of public funds. Many vice-chancellors are currently facing investigations or trial for looting university funds.

This study highlights that the university is no longer an embodiment of the public good in Nigeria. From 1950 to 1980, education was an instrument for promoting hope and social mobility for the children of the masses. That was how the inextricable linkage between higher education and the public good developed. Since 1980, however, rising income inequality and the expansion of young people in search of what Nigerians called 'the golden fleece' has created a new dynamic. The linkage between higher education and the public good, which could be the pathway for rebuilding a state that would provide prosperity, welfare and security for all its citizens, has been shattered.

In removing their children from the Nigerian public university system, the elite have ensured that it is the children of the poor who are the main beneficiaries of public university education and that they are not competitive compared to foreign-trained children. Essentially, the Nigerian state has abdicated its responsibility for the qualitative development of the children of the masses and stalled their social mobility. Increasingly, high-paying jobs are open mainly to foreign-trained Nigerians. The result is that the Nigerian state has provoked a class struggle in which poorly educated youth and the lumpen classes are consuming the country in sectarian violence, insurgency, militancy and rural banditry.

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